

The Power of the Dark Side

"You don't know the power of the dark side... the Emperor will show you the true nature of the Force. He is your master now." -- Darth Vader speaking to Luke Skywalker

High over the Endor moon, a great space battle raged across the jeweled night. And in the throne room of the second Death Star, Luke Skywalker stood, for the first time, before Emperor Palpatine, supreme architect of the galaxy-engulfing Empire.

It quickly became clear to Luke that this decrepit and seemingly defenseless old man was masterfully adept in the ways of the dark side of the Force. Indeed, as Vader had warned, the Emperor had become the dark side's most powerful expression.

With sublime arrogance, the old magician threw down a challenge to the young Jedi:

"I can feel your anger. I am defenseless. Take your weapon! Strike me down with all your hatred and your journey towards the Dark Side will be complete!"

The Emperor's confidence rested on a sure knowledge of what he had become... and what the Dark Side could do for him. He seemed open to all the possibilities of the moment: Luke's death, Vader's death... even his own death.

No matter what the outcome of this terrible confrontation, he, Emperor Palpatine, would conquer.

Flesh Does Not Easily Support This Power

As we now know, at that fateful moment the Emperor already possessed a great secret: he was utterly unafraid to die, because death could lay no claim on him!

In the beginning, as he machinated his way from Senator to President of the Old Republic, the dark side of the Force had been a key to political ascendancy. When he declared himself Emperor, it became his means of consolidation and control of the galaxy. The mere fact that, through the Force, he could observe his political enemies without their knowledge, gave him an insurmountable advantage over ordinary men.

And his dark side powers, combined with the most sophisticated military technology ever known, provided the strength he needed to vanquish his most dangerous opponents: the thousands of *Jedi Knights*, guardians of justice throughout the galaxy.

But early on, Palpatine learned that addiction to the fathomless energies of the dark side carried a great price: age and physical decay hastened their pace, and his body collapsed toward ruin, like a world oppressed.

It was a vexing predicament for one who had succeeded in subjugating everyone and everything that stood in his path. The most ruthless Enemy of all -- *death* -- was laughing in his face.

The Secret of Ashka Boda

Desperate for a solution to his dilemma, the Emperor sent agents into every part of the galaxy, searching libraries, sifting the wisdom of alien cultures, combing the detritus of civilizations long dead for forgotten secrets and cures.

Jedi Masters were brought before him and questioned and tortured, in the hope that their dying screams might reveal some bit of aeons-old lore. Eventually something was found, an artifact in the possession of a very old and very wise Jedi named Ashka Boda. Ashka Boda was murdered -- and the ancient object he held in his possession was confiscated. Then, putting the science of cloning together with the knowledge he stole from the old Jedi, the Emperor prepared himself for a transition... to *eternal life*.

The Cloning of Absolute Malevolence

So it was, while the newly formed Rebel Alliance struggled valiantly against an ever-expanding tide of tyranny and darkness, Emperor Palpatine instituted his stratagem for ultimate survival.

On a hidden world, deep in the Galactic Core, Palpatine prepared a *genetic clone* of himself, and raised this clone to young manhood.

At the moment when his diseased and crippled flesh could no longer sustain itself, he moved, as mind and formless energy, into the youthful replica!

However, because of imperfections in the cloning process, the new vessel was more vulnerable to the depredations of the dark side. As a result, the Emperor's new body would age even more rapidly than the old, becoming corrupted and useless within a few short years.

But other clones were being prepared, and others after them. With an inexhaustible supply of young and healthy receptacles at his disposal, the Emperor could spit in the eye of death... and rule confidently over the Empire... *forever*.

When Darth Vader hurled Emperor Palpatine to his doom, it seemed to Luke and the Alliance that the rule of Darkness had come to an end. But in that moment when flashing blue energy rushed from exploded flesh, the Emperor entered a bodiless transitional state. As conscious Dark Force he was translated across the galaxy...

In the clone labs on Byss, a young Emperor opened his eyes... and laughed. He had *won*. The Empire would survive.

Welcome to Byss, a Dark Side World

In the Deep Galactic Core, hidden behind the protection of the Imperial Hyperspace Security Net, lie whole systems of worlds shrouded in mystery and legend.

Chief among these worlds is Byss, a place of sinister beauty and luminosity, a world completely imbued with the power of the dark side.

It is on Byss that the Emperor is establishing his model for the galaxy-wide society of the far future, when the dark side of the Force will rule all without the need for weapons.

It is on Byss that he took a clone body, and here new clone bodies are being continually created for him, in laboratories operated and supervised by Dark Side Adepts and Clone Keepers.

And it is here, in ascending orbits over the planet, that the Emperor has reunited and reformed his military forces, in preparation for a final crushing blow against those who would deny him control of the galaxy

Byss is a Place of Ominous Peace and Harmony

. Throughout the worlds submissive to the Empire, Byss is renowned as a paradise, whose siren call draws multitudes to willingly apply for emigration to its shores.

Once there, wrapped in the power of the dark side, the immigrants become completely submissive, their life energy forever enslaved to the mind that would devour a galaxy. In the years prior to the Battle of Yavin, Byss was known as the Emperor's private retreat. Here he began quietly training Dark Side Adepts, initiating men of great intelligence who had committed their lives to his service. None were permitted to ascend to his level of knowledge and proficiency, but the Adepts nonetheless became powerful dark side magicians in their own right.

Using their "science of darkness," they learned to feed on the life energy of others, accumulating Force energy in their own bodies. And they learned to redirect this accumulated power in many ways -- either as a weapon or in the manipulation of molecular structures.

Legend says that Adepts of the Dark Side have even succeeded in spawning living monstrosities -- beasts and intelligent entities, some unspeakably ugly, some full of malevolent charm and symmetry, all utterly permeated by the power of the dark side.

As we know, it is to Byss that *Luke Skywalker* was transported, aboard a dungeon ship, after he uncovered clues to the Emperor's continued existence. It is on Byss that Luke has found his ultimate encounter with the man (if so he can be called) whose greatest wish is to extinguish the light of the Jedi Knights *forever*!

It is also on Byss and its surrounding worlds that the Emperor is constructing his newest technological threat -- the awesomely destructive *World Devastators*.

War Technology More Lethal Than the Death Star

"Great fires burn in its belly...and everything it eats is transformed into new instruments of doom." -- Umak Leth, Imperial Engineer

With these words the principal designer of the World Devastator introduced his conception of a factory ship that could smash a city... and recycle everything it destroyed. Miles high, miles wide, powered by massive ion engines and repulsorlift gravity transformers, the World Devastators are not a sight you'd want to behold descending over *your* home planet.

Their voracious maws hold raging molecular furnaces, powered by microscopic black holes. These engines of destruction suck whole cities into their guts, breaking down everything they consume into atomic particles and simple molecules... then reassembling atoms and molecules into raw materials for outboard and onboard manufacturing.

The core of each Devastator is materials processing: blast furnaces, metals works, foundries, stamping mills, chemical vats, and testing laboratories.

Some materials are warehoused and freighted to specialized industrial planets light years distant. The rest are fed into the factory levels, where slave labor and assembly-line droids turn out an unending supply of TIE fighters, ground assault vehicles, laser and ion cannons, stormtrooper gear, sensor drones, probe and weapons droids, small arms, munitions, missiles, computer components and spare parts.

The upper decks house control towers, offices, crew quarters and recreation, hangar bays and freight docking.

Like the Death Star, every exposed surface of the World Devastator is protected by turbolaser and ion cannons and proton torpedo emplacements. Gun towers and missile launch ports scar and slash the surface of the Devastator like the countenance of a battle-hardened warrior. Every manufacturing level has its own defense emplacements and TIE squadron.

Shield generators envelop the whole diabolic machine in overlapping protective energy fields. These fields can be selectively lowered or "windowed" to permit weapons to fire and ships to dock or embark. Finally, to prevent the World Devastators from falling into unfriendly hands, their complex computer and guidance systems are regulated from the planet Byss, via a single Master Control Signal beamed through hyperspace.

This crowning touch would seem to provide maximal protection for the city-smashing battle stations... And yet, even as we speak the Rebel Alliance has activated its galaxy-wide network of Bothan spies, with a desperate command: bring us the code of the Master Control Signal!

Bothans, as we know, are an alien race dedicated to the art of spying -- and willingly donating their services to the Alliance. Before the great Battle of Endor, Mon Mothma spoke of critical data on the second Death Star "Brought to us by the Bothan spies... Many Bothans died to bring us this information."

It was later revealed, however, that the information the Bothans delivered was planted by the Emperor. It is thus an open question whether the Bothans are entirely competent -- or entirely loyal to the Alliance!

This first appeared as text pages at the end of Dark Empire #2, by Tom Veitch and Cam Kennedy, published by Dark Horse Comics in 1992.